

Conclusion and Summary of Recommendations from Cultivating Rural Prosperity

The aim of the plan is to preserve and enhance the social fabric of rural Kentucky while building a sustainable economic base rooted in local communities and maintaining environmental integrity. The Commonwealth has a valuable asset in its rural landscape. The best way to take advantage of this asset is to preserve it as a working model of itself - as a self-sustaining rural economy. The three distinct rural areas of Eastern, Central and Western Kentucky should focus on those farm products most suitable for their local environment.

The primary recommendations of this plan include:

- Creating a comprehensive local, regional and state marketing system for Kentucky farm products
- Creating a system to encourage a variety of forms of capital investment in agricultural enterprises
- Providing financial incentives for environmental stewardship measures such as the Soil Erosion and Water Quality cost-share program, implementation of best-management practices in timber stands, and farmland preservation efforts
- Strengthening and improving the accessibility of education and training programs tailored specifically for the needs of farm families
- Creating programs to develop local leadership, support county agricultural development councils, and enhance the Cooperative Extension Service network
- Maintaining strong commitments to applied research in existing farm product areas, and exploring the viability of high value markets in non-traditional areas

Specific recommendations within each of the above priority areas include:

- Instituting a state certification program that will allow certified agricultural producers access to state markets such as parks and prisons by providing a quality-assured product
- Expanding a state database to include all certified products, including meat and poultry
- Developing a county-based inventory of timber resources utilizing global positioning technology and catalogued in a state database
- Providing support for woodlot demonstration projects that include complementary crops such as mushrooms and ginseng
- Providing market venues for load lots of preconditioned livestock
- Studying the costs and benefits of a state system to connect the major trails in the state as part of efforts to develop agri-tourism
- Coordinating with the state Economic Development Cabinet to find clean industry to supplement farm incomes
- Urging farmers to invest payments from the National Tobacco Growers Settlement Trust (Phase II) in the diversification of their operations
- Enhancing demonstration projects to promote rotational grazing, pasture renovation and soil building techniques
- Investing in improved hay production and handling practices to open the market for horse hay to Kentucky farmers
- Encouraging programs that raise the value of Kentucky beef cattle
- Supporting and upgrading existing meat processors to open markets for farm-fresh livestock products

- Expanding vegetable grower education programs to open commercial markets
- Encouraging tobacco farmers to retrofit greenhouses to grow winter vegetables, flowers and bedding plants
- Seeking markets for edible soybeans and food-grade corn products
- Exploring the feasibility of renewable fuel production
- Developing a market for hunting rights in cooperation with state Fish and Wildlife authorities
- Building Kentucky's agriculture based businesses
- Providing adequate capital through the coordination of existing and new programs such as the Agricultural Finance Corporation, Linked Deposit Loan program, direct loans, loan purchases, loan guaranties, venture capital and near-equity programs

This document is intended to be Kentucky's first comprehensive plan for agricultural and rural prosperity, the first step in a process that by its nature requires a strong long-term commitment. As such, it raises a number of questions and presents a number of ideas that will need to be developed further if they are to be

acted upon. The Agricultural Development Board and the Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy recognize a responsibility to provide a blueprint to aid in the development of this plan. The Agricultural Development Board in collaboration with county councils, agricultural organizations, farmers and interested citizens will annually review this plan. It is the intention of the Agricultural Development Board that this review process will reflect the open and inclusive manner by which the plan was created. The staff of the Board will present a progress report on plan implementation annually.

